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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: ANTI-PIRACY EFFORTS IN CASABLANCA DO NOT DETER
VENDORS

REF: 06 CASABLANCA 883

11. (SBU) Summary: Following a series of seizures of pirated CDs and DVDs, Moroccan authorities destroyed some 80,000 discs on March 27 in Casablanca. Undeterred, illegal CD and DVD vendors remain in business, buoyed by strong demand and the knowledge that periodic raids are annoying, but not ruinous. Despite limited effectiveness, Moroccan authorities plan to continue seizures. For their part, local artists are considering new ways to package and distribute their work to circumvent pirates and retain profits. While the government has taken steps to curb piracy, more needs to be done to enforce laws, disable pirating networks and raise public awareness about IP and copyright laws. End Summary.

CD/DVD DESTRUCTION DOES NOT DETER VENDORS

12. (U) Moroccan authorities, in concert with the Moroccan Copyright Office (BMDA) and the Moroccan Cinematic Center (CCM), destroyed about 80,000 pirated CDs and DVDs on March 27 in Casablanca. The destruction followed a series of seizures around the city that included music CDs, software, and foreign and Moroccan films from markets around Casablanca.

13. (U) The seizure and destruction of thousands of pirated CDs and DVDs has not deterred vendors from selling pirated goods. First, seizures are not a new phenomenon. In Casablanca, renowned Derb Ghallef, a black market maze of over 1000 shops selling everything from iPods to designer clothing to furniture, a CD and DVD vendor named Rachid estimated that there had been five raids in the past year. A vendor named Youssef thought there had been three. Whatever the number, both viewed periodic seizures as part of doing business. With a smile and a shrug, Rachid told econoff that authorities had confiscated his entire stock in mid-March, along with the television and DVD player he used to demo his goods. In less than a week, however, his shop was up and running again, the shelves full of music and movies and a new TV in place. Youssef had fared better, losing only 1000 of his DVDs. Knowing the risk of raids, he never displays all his stock. "Raids have been happening since we sold VHS tapes," he said, indicating that they are more a nuisance than a threat.

14. (U) The strong demand for pirated material also keeps vendors in business. With no stores selling legitimate CDs and DVDs, consumers rely on local vendors to supply pirated versions. Furthermore, the price of counterfeit CDs and DVDs

has fallen dramatically in the past five years, from 20 MAD to 10, making them affordable to a large swath of people. Given the lack of legitimate CDs and DVDs and the plethora of cheap pirated versions, consumers from every social stratum buy them) either in Derb Ghallef, which attracts a diverse clientele, or at other locales around Casablanca, including shops in the upscale Maarif neighborhood or in plain sight on the sidewalks in front of big-name stores such as Zara. In the face of prevalent supply and high demand, few seem to consider or care that their actions are illegal and infringe on intellectual property rights.

IF SEIZURES DON,T WORK, WHAT WILL?

¶5. (U) Despite the fact that vendors of pirated CDs and DVDs seem to view seizures as merely a job hazard, Moroccan authorities plan to continue such operations. Abderrahim Bouamri, CCM,s chief of control, declared that the recent round of seizures and destruction "will be generalized to all Moroccan cities." BMDA,s Director, Abdallah Ouadrhiri, commented that the operation was part of a global strategy to save cultural creativity and honor Morocco,s commitment to copyright protection. According to statistics reported in daily French-language newspaper L'Economiste, authorities seized 0.9 million discs in 2005, 1.6 million in 2006 and 2.7 million in 2007, indicating that anti-piracy efforts have increased, at least when it comes to destroying pirated goods.

Given that an estimated 36 million CDs and DVDs enter the informal market each year, however, the destruction of a few million is just a drop in the bucket.

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¶6. (U) Given the enormity of the piracy problem, artists are creating their own ways to protect their work. The Casablancan singer "Barry," for example, distributed his 2006 album Sleeping System in an issue of the weekly magazine Telquel. Casablanca-based music group Darga released its recent album Stop Baraka in two versions: premium for 40 MAD and economic for 13 DH. The packaging between the two differs, but the content is the same and both bear the BMDA mark. In addition, the album cover is printed on all CDs to distinguish them from pirated copies. The group also is taking a new approach to distribution, selling premium CDs at restaurants, bars, cafes and bookstores in five cities around Morocco. The hope is that initiatives such as these will curb the loss of profits to artists and combat pirating by cutting pirates out of the loop.

¶7. (U) The fact that artists feel compelled to take such measures suggests that the government could do more to stop piracy at its source. Film distributor Najib Benkirane told French-language newspaper La Nouvelle Tribune that "Morocco is one of the most protected countries against piracy. We just have to apply the law." Similarly, Morocco,s Association for the Fight Against Piracy has noted that recent laws have expanded anti-piracy measures, and that the Minister of Interior has pledged to create an anti-piracy division. Increased government involvement and enforcement of the law would help nip Morocco,s piracy problem in the bud.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: While the government has made efforts to curb piracy from a Casablanca perspective, including beefed-up laws, seizures, arrests and awareness campaigns, more needs to be done. In addition to disabling pirates and their networks and creating alternative job opportunities, authorities must also redouble their efforts to educate the public about the importance of respecting intellectual property and copyright laws. End Comment.

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